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ABSTRACT

For communication programs one means of developing a strong working relationship with the business and professional communities, improving program curriculum planning, and encouraging input on other departmental issues is to establish a professional advisory council. Advisory boards serve several practical purposes for a communication department. They aid in meeting the changing demands in the preparation of communication practitioners, provide contacts for internships for students, help assess strengths and weaknesses of current departmental programs, bring contemporary issues and directions to the attention of the faculty, add credibility to the programs of a department, help students develop employment contacts, and help program-specific accreditation development. Boards are formed by having a committee responsible for developing selection criteria, gaining clearance for the members of the board from university officials, inviting membership, and planning the meeting agenda. Issues related to board membership include the length of term, expectations of board members beyond advisement, frequency of board meetings, and gathering regular feedback from board members. Communication departments are encouraged to develop a strong working relationship with the business and professional communities. (Appendixes present a description of a particular advisory council, a sample letter sent to council members, and a description of a special event in which council members become "faculty for a day.") (RS)

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Establishing Professional Advisory Councils for Communication Programs

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Establishing Professional Advisory Councils

for Communication Programs

Abstract

In an age of uncertainty and rapid change, where a production-driven economy is giving way to a service-drawn economy, the perception of what is an adequate curriculum for preparation of communication majors to meet the needs of the twenty-first century changes rapidly. One means of developing a strong working relationship with the business and professional communities and improving our curriculum planning and encouraging input on other departmental issues is to establish a professional advisory council. Our purpose is to: (1) analyze why it it is important to establish advisory councils; (2) suggest what to do in implementing advisory coucils; and (3) identify selected issues regarding maintaining an advisory council for an academic unit.

Establishing Professional Advisory Councils for Communication Programs

In an age of uncertainty and rapid change, where a production-driven economy is giving way to a service-drawn economy, the perception of what is an adequate curriculum for preparation of communication majors to meet the needs of the twenty-first century changes rapidly. One means of developing a strong working relationship with the business and professional communities and improving our curriculum planning and encouraging input on other departmental issues is to establish a professional advisory council. Our purpose is to: (1) analyze why it it is important to establish advisory councils; (2) suggest what to do in implementing advisory coucils; and (3) identify selected issues regarding maintaining an advisory council for an academic unit.

Overview

Tropman and Morningstar (1985) indicate, "The Advisory Committee is designed, of course, to give advice." The writers continue, "As simple as that statement sounds, it is very hard to put into practice. People like to make decisions; they do not like to think that their decisions are being given to someone else who might reject them. It's the job of the Advisory Committee to consider a problem and recommend a solution or a range of solutions for it." (p. 147) Most advisory boards have some influence upon decisions of the organization and perform a valuable service. Advisory committees and boards are of various types. Administrative advisory committees, program advisory

committees, general advisory committees, and ad hoc advisory committees are among the types. (see Handbook for local advisory committees, 1977, p. 3-4)

The Communication Department at our campus, has over five hundred majors divided among organizational, public relations, broadcasting and film, and journalistic communication. This midsize university (approximately 12,000 students) is located within an hours drive of a major midwestern city--the thirtieth largest television market. (Broadcast Cable Yearbook '89, 1989, (p. c-176)

In 1983 the department created a Professional Relations Committee. The charge of the committee included:

This committee will work toward the establishment of a Professional Advisory Council for the department to encourage the guidance and support of professionals for our academic programs.

The committee memebers proposed an Advisory Council composed of established professionals from each of the four professional, undergraduate majors of the department. Council members were to be managerial through executive levels primarily from the service area of the university (twenty-two counties).

Why Establish Advisory Councils?

Evolving an effective curriculum to meet the changing demands in the preparation of communication practitioners remains the primary reason for establishing and maintaining an advisory council. Members of the department recognize the need to responding quickly and appropriately to our primary employment market.

Advisory councils serve to provide contacts for internships for students and faculty. Each member represents a business, service, or governmental organization that has potential for internships. Additionally, each

professional has contacts with colleagues in the business that may result in productive internship placement.

Advisory boards help assess strengths and weaknesses of current departmental programs. At each meeting time is provided for members to interact with students majoring in the professional's area of expertise. Through these interactions, with faculty, feedback from internship observation, and an examination of curriculum, advisors give insightful feedback that augments greatly regular faculty and course evaluations by faculty peers and student reviews.

Board members bring contemporary issues and directions to the attention of the faculty of the department. Discussion time with faculty should be provided during business, program, and luncheon times of the on-campus visits in order to maximize this vital exchange. At the luncheon in particular faculty sit with professionals in their area of teaching to form an on-going dialogue regarding curricular developments and changes in professional applications.

The credibility of the program is enhanced through board participation. For example, on our board has been the senior editor of a major metropolitan newspaper. Certainly the prestige of this professional and his willingness to serve on our board has enhanced the perception of our journalism majors. The same is true for organizational communication, braodcasting and film, and public relations.

Students have the opportunity to develop employment contacts from members of our advisory boards. Board members are familiar with our programs, faculty, and appear favorable to employing our students, many of whom they have met in advance, of any employment interview. When employment is not a possibility with the firm of the advisory board member,

he or she often shares his or her personal network of contacts with the student. In addition to discussing the equipment, it is meaningful to students when board members discuss ethics, integrity and other values faculty attempt to inculcate in our students.

Members of our board regularly attend and participate in classroom sessions. They excite students as they tell of the challenges and opportunities that await our graduates. At times, students have had their perceptions of the glamour of a given major tarnished to a degree by the realism provided by professionals. This, too, we believe is a positive aspect of having advisory board participation. Not only do they agree to be guest speakers, but enjoy being questioned by students and to serve as "instructor for a day."

Among the more salient advantages of having advisory boards is in the credibility the boards give to the process of gaining accreditation. The accreditation process for our journalism, broadcasting and film, and public relations is well under way. An accreditation progress review visit is planned for 1990. An active advisory board will be one checkpoint in gaining a favorable review. Advisory members tend to develop involvement that often leads to donating equipment and other materials. They also arrange field trips meaningful to our students' education.

These eight outcomes of advisory boards complement the program of our department, work to the advantage of our students, and encourage and challenge our faculty's continued development.

What Do You Do

First, you should define the purpose of the advisory board. Cunninggin (1985) identifies seven "chief purposes for which advisory committees are established." They include: (1) strengthening the academic program; (2) improvement of the school's internal management; (3) evaluating

performance; (4) recruitment of personnel; (5) fund raising; (6) improvement of public relations; and (7) betterment of outside relationships. (p. 16) The general charge (see Appendix A for further detail) we negotiated with our advisory board members was to:

> Provide guidance and suggestions regarding the four major professional degree programs (broadcasting and Film, Journalism, Public Relations, and Organizational Communication) of the department.

Board members may formulate their own purpose with separate times to deliberate and formulate advice. Or, as in our example, they may prefer open dialogue with faculty present in evolving their purpose.

Consider criteria for initial board member selection carefully. The teaching faculty of each major should be encouraged to think big. Who would add the most to achieving the goals of the advisory board should be the overriding criteria for nomination of a board member. Criteria should include: (1) professional visibility; (2) influence (credibility of the member; (3) level of authority (span of control)--management of human services and control over plant and equipment; (4) training experience; (5) and so forth are examples of nomination criteria.

We believe boards should have at least three core members (regular attenders) for each of the professional programs represented. Some board members are willing to lend their names to advisory boards, but will not be regular in attendance. While all qualified members may be helpful, those who participate are the most valuable.

Clearance for formulation of an advisory council and for inviting each member should be secured from appropriate administrators. At our university, clearance is gained through the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences office, the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, and, finally,

must be approved by the President of the University. Members of the board represent the university and the administration should be informed of who has been nominated to the board and give assent. These arrangements will vary from campus to campus. However, proper clearance is essential.

Invitations from the President have added prestige to members of the professional community who would receive them. Our president requested that we have an informal agreement to serve before sending out the invitations to board members. These details save potential embarrassment for all concerned.

Primary responsibility for coordinating the details of establishing a board was given to the Professional Relations Committee of the Department of Communication. This committee initiated the proposal to the department, solicited criteria for members, developed a working list of proposed members, interacted with the Department, Dean, Vice President of Advancement, and President, and established the agenda for the first meeting.

Each member selected had to be contacted personally. Committee members and other department members were assigned the task of making contact with the professionals. As some agreed (see Appendix B) and some opted not to be a member of the board, the list was expanded until a degree of balance was obtained.

The Professional Relations Committee, with departmental approval, called the first meeting and determined the working agenda. The first meeting was devoted largely to discussing the charge of the committee and deciding on whether the members preferred to select their own leadership or to be led by faculty of the department. In our particular case, the members preferred meetings led by faculty from the department. This may change as members develop cohesion and wish to operate with their own agenda. A

feature of the first meeting included a tour of our facilities. A central purpose or theme is issued to guide each meeting. The fall, 1989 meeting focused on a discussion of professional ethics. Ultimately, members of the board were asked to consider what ethical issues should be discussed in each of the major undergraduate areas to prepare our students best for the world of business communication. Interestingly, the discussion on ethics ultimately led to the development of a program on ethics that was presented at the seventy-sixth annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association in Chicago. Both the chair of the program and the respondent were members of our Professional Advisory Board who paid their own expenses to be a part of this departmental program in Chicago.

The Spring, 1991 board meeting will be actively oriented with each member of the Professional Advisory Board being, "A Faculty Member for a Day." (see Appendix C) Faculty will be assigned a board member (in their discipline) to teach their morning classes. The board member will know in advance what classes he or she will teach and can prepare accordingly. The faculty member will serve as host and attend class, but the board member will take roll and teach the class. Between classes, the board member will do the normal things faculty do such as hold office hours, grade papers, advise students, etc. This experience promises to be a rich learning experience for all involved and should serve to increase appreciation for one another's perspective and responsibilities.

Issues

There are salient issues that necessitate consideration in forming advisory boards. One issue is how clear is the mission and role of the advisory board. It saves much frustration for all if each "player" knows how the game is played in advance.

Tropman and Morningstar (1985) say that one thing that should be established early is "that advice should be in writing." (p. 148) Further they indicate that the advisee should not be her or his own advisory board chair. (p. 149) In addition to advice being in writing, we make it a practice to issue minutes promptly after each Professional Advisory meeting.

One issue is whether members should serve for a specified term or until they choose to resign. To date, our board has not decided on a specified length of term.

Another issue is what expectations, if any, should members of the department have for advisory board members beyond advisement. Should members of the board be expected to: (1) provide equipment; (2) show preference in hiring graduates of our university; (3) give internships to students in the program; and (4) aid in soliciting donations for scholarships or other related causes for the department.

How often the boards should meet is an issue for discussion and development. Our plan is for the advisory boards to meet one in the fall and once in the spring.

A related issue is the question of the "life" of the advisory board. The National Centeral for Research in Vocational Education at Ohio State University (1982) suggests "The advisory committee should be a continuing committee functioning as long as the instructional program remains in operation." (p. 17)

Further, we believe professional advisory members should be asked to provide feedback regarding board service. Currently we are developing a survey to send to board members to ascertain how frequently they would like to meet, what issues they would like to discuss at future meetings, how successful past meetings have been, who they would recommend to fill board

vacancies, and, in general, how pleased they are with the way their time has been used. We believe each board member must feel that their time and energy is well spent or we will lose their participation.

Summary

Advisory boards serve several practical purposes for a department. They aid in meeting the changing demands in the preparation of communication practitioners, provide contacts for internships for students, help assess strengths and weaknesses of current departmental programs, bring contemporary issues and directions to the attention of the faculty, add credibility to the programs of a department, help students develop employment contacts, and help program-specific accreditation development.

Boards are formed by having a committee responsible for developing selection criteria, gaining clearance for the members of the board from university officials, inviting membership, and planning the meeting agenda of the advisory board.

Issues related to board membership include the length of term, expectations of board members beyond advisement, frequency of board meetings, and gathering regular feedback from board members.

Communication departments are encouraged to develop a strong working relationship with the business and professional communities and, thereby, fulfill the theme of our next national convention, "SCA Reaches Out."

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Appendix A

Professional Advisory Council
of the
Department of Communication
_____ University

The Department of Communication has established a Professional Advisory Council which is intended to provide guidance and suggestions regarding the four major professional degree programs of the department.

STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

The council is comprised of four committees: broadcasting, journalism, organizational communication and public relations. Each of these committees includes from seven to ten respected professionals, representing their respective fields of study.

MEMBERSHIP ON THE COUNCIL

Membership on the council is based upon nominations from the Professional Relations Committee. Members normally serve three year terms, with one-third of the members terms of service ending each year.

FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

One of the primary functions of the council is to assist the department in its efforts to serve the professional represented. To this end the advisory council reviews the mission and goals of the degree programs and the department.

Each advisory council committee assists in the implementation of those goals in the specialized degree programs. This includes reviewing the curricula, facilities, internship opportunities, and placement of graduates. Additional functions of the council are to facilitate the participation of those professionals in classes, student organizations, field trips, and fundraising.

The department periodically reviews its programs, and also is reviewed by appropriate committees and administrators of the university and by the state Coordinating Board of Higher Education in Missouri. The council is of assistance in these reviews in an advisory capacity.

This council functions in conjunction with the Professional Relations Committee of the department.

MEETINGS

The council normally meets semiannually. One meeting each year is held on campus to review the facilities and to make contact with students and faculty. The second meeting may be held in Kansas City to accommodate for the travel time of members of the council.

Appendix B

November 4, 1987

&name&
&title/O&
&company/O&
&street/O&
&city&

Dear &salutation&:

We are pleased that you have accepted our invitation to serve on the Professional Advisory Council of the Department of Communication. The first meeting of the council has been scheduled for Thursday, November 19.

A preliminary agenda has been drawn up, and is enclosed with this letter. We should stress, however, that the council will have considerable latitude in setting its own agenda, and we encourage you to actively participate in the proceedings by offering suggestions and engaging in dialogue with other members of the council and members of our faculty.

Also enclosed with this letter is a map of the campus on which we have marked appropriate parking locations. There is also a guest parking permit which will allow you to park in an "A" lot on campus. We recommend lots number 26 or 53 which are fairly close to Martin Building, and which usually have numerous parking spaces available. There will be students available who can direct you to Martin Building.

We hope to start the meeting at 9:15 a.m., because the agenda for the day is challenging. We will conclude with a working luncheon in the Faculty Lounge of the University Union. At that time we will be seeking your suggestions as you consult with the faculty who specialize in the four professional degree programs of the department. If you have difficulty arriving by 9:15, come when you can because your counsel will be valued at any stage of the proceedings.

For emergency contacts during the day, you can be reached at (816)-429-4750. We look forward to seeing you on the 19th.

Sincerely,

_____, Chair
Professional Relations Committee

Enclosures: Preliminary Agenda
Council Members
Campus Map and Parking Permit

Appendix C

Faculty for a Day Special Event Fact Sheet
Department of Communication
April 10, 1991

What is this special event?

Faculty for a Day will be an all-day special event where Dept of Communication Professional Advisory Council members will teach various communication classes in the morning and will participate in student organizational meetings in the afternoon. In addition, there will be a luncheon and reception that will allow faculty and students in broadcasting and film, public relations, journalism, mass communication, speech communication and organizational communication to interact with Council members and one another.

What is its purpose?

Faculty for a Day is designed to bring professionals into the classroom to offer expertise in their fields. They will also be involved with student organizations in their respective disciplines and will provide input and suggestions to students on an individual basis and as a group. The event is also designed to act as an aid in enhancing the perception of teaching and to bring the business professional into higher education.

Who's involved?

Professional Advisory Council members are business men and women from Kansas City and the surrounding region who are selected by the Department of Communication to advise faculty and students on their programs. Members convene on campus each semester for a day's meeting and also offer individual counseling to faculty and students throughout the year. PAC members are selected through the Department's Professional Relations Committee and may serve on the Council for more than one year.

Faculty from the Department will act as teacher-hosts for the morning event. They will also participate in the luncheon and reception and faculty advisors for student organizations will participate in organizational meetings to be held that afternoon.

Students in communication classes and majors from respective disciplines are invited to learn from the PAC members throughout the day. Student leaders in Department of Communication organizations such as PRSSA(Public Relations Student Society of America), SCS(Speech Communication Society) A Rho(Broadcasting) and SPJ (Journalism) will be invited for the luncheon and will conduct afternoon organizational meetings. Students in Publicity, a public relations course, will organize and conduct the special event. All majors are invited to the afternoon reception.

Where and when?

The event will be held on Wednesday, April 10 from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Most classses are in Martin-Wood building and the noon luncheon will be held in the Dept TV Studio from 12:30-1:30 p.m. Organizational meetings will be held in Martin-Wood Building from 1:30-2:30 p.m. and the reception will be held backin the Dept TV Studio from 2:30-3:30 p.m.